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ABSTRACT

In Arkansas, in reaction to complaints about traditional methods of selection for promotion, the civil service commission has chosen to base promotions in the police department solely on scores on locally-developed objective tests. Items developed and loaded into a computerized test bank were selected from six areas of responsibility: (1) criminal code; (2) traffic laws; (3) criminal investigation procedures; (4) department policy and procedures; (5) supervision; and (6) administration. Items in the data bank were validated by four police captains. A 424-item test bank was constructed and validated for use for police promotion examinations. Examinations were constructed and administered to officers at each level. On the examination for promotion to sergeant, 38.5% of the patrolmen passed. For promotion to lieutenant, 33.3% of sergeants passed. For promotion to captain, 40% of the lieutenants passed. The initial reactions of officers was favorable. This flexible system allows tests to be generated as needed and to be updated as laws and policies change. An appendix lists the references used in construction of the item bank. (SLD)

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DEVELOPMENT, VALIDATION, AND USE OF AN ITEM BANK FOR POLICE PROMOTION EXAMINATIONS

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
Mid-South Educational Research Association

Louisville, Kentucky
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DEVELOPMENT, VALIDATION, AND USE OF AN ITEM BANK FOR POLICE PROMOTION EXAMINATIONS

Background

Historically, police departments have had the reputation of promoting the "good ol' boys" whether or not they were the most qualified. To regulate police and fire departmental promotion and hiring practices, legislation was enacted in the State of Arkansas to give each community the option to establish a civil service commission as an independent supervisory and policy-making body.

In communities choosing to create such a civil service commission, there has been much activity in monitoring and enforcing fair employment practices. Much time has been spent in developing hiring and promotion criteria, and monitoring hiring and promotion examinations.

Once the civil service commission was established locally, members of the commission received complaints about "good ol' boy" promoting practices. When promotion examinations were adopted, officers complained about taking tests which were perceived to be irrelevant to local standards since these tests were developed for "far-off big city" police departments.

To develop examinations locally, officers were asked to participate in writing test items. Police promotion examinations were also acquired from nearby communities. Although good intentions were evident, few usable items resulted from these practices. Thus, to develop a system to generate police promotion examinations locally, a test consultant was hired.

Methods and Procedures

In Arkansas, recent litigation has ruled against the inclusion of traditionally heavily weighted factors, such as seniority, in the promotion process. As a result, the civil service commission has chosen to base promotions solely on scores on locally developed "objective" tests.

In the local police department, there are three levels of promotion examinations: patrolman to sergeant, sergeant to lieutenant, and lieutenant to captain. These promotion examinations are used to develop lists from which officers are promoted from one rank to the next. Once promoted, the officer serves a probationary period of six months. During the probationary period, the chief of police may reassign the officer to the previous rank.

Prior to developing procedures and items for the item bank, the consultant interviewed 15 officers of the police department at various ranks. These interviews were conducted to gain familiarity with the roles of the police officers and their expectations for a fair promotion examination procedure. The consultant also rode in a patrol car to experience the day-to-day activities of the police officer.

The promotion examination administered to patrolmen covers four areas of the patrolman's responsibility: (1) Criminal Code; (2) Traffic Laws; (3) Criminal Investigation Procedures; and (4) Department Policy and Procedures. Once promoted, the officer receives training in supervision, a job responsibility of a sergeant. For promotion, sergeants are tested on the four aforementioned areas of responsibility and a fifth area: (5) Supervision. Once promoted, these officers receive training in administration, a job responsibility of a lieutenant. For promotion, lieutenants are tested on the five aforementioned areas of responsibility plus a sixth area: (6) Administration.

Items from each of these six areas of responsibility were developed and loaded into a computerized test item bank, Micro Test II. Although the items were constructed as four choice multiple choice items, they were entered in the free item (essay) format to accommodate the referencing of each item. Each item in the bank is keyed to a specific reference text as listed in the Appendix. Multiple copies of these texts are made available to each officer on a check out basis.

Items entered into the data bank were validated for use by four captains in the department. To assess the appropriateness of each item to be included in a local police promotion examination, each captain was independently asked to write "yes" or "no" next to each item on a printout each of the captains was given. Items which did not receive unanimous approval of the captains were discarded from the item bank.

Results

A 424-item test item bank was constructed and validated for use for police promotion examinations. Promotion examinations were constructed and administered to the officers at each level.

The average score on the promotion examination taken by patrolmen for promotion to sergeant was 69.1 percent of the items answered correctly with 38.5 percent of the officers passing this examination. The average score on the promotion examination taken by sergeants for promotion to lieutenant was

63.3 percent of the items answered correctly with 33.3 percent of the officers passing this examination. The average score on the promotion examination taken by lieutenants for promotion to captain was 62.0 percent of the items answered correctly with 40.0 percent of the officers passing this examination.

Once items are administered, information from the test administration is recorded in the item bank: (1) date of administration of the item, (2) number of officers tested on the item, (3) number of officers answering the item correctly, and (4) the item difficulty from that test administration.

Conclusions

The initial reaction of officers taking a promotion examination was "That's the fairest it's ever been." In addition, this system is flexible: (1) to generate tests as needed for practice and promotion and (2) to update and edit the test item bank as laws and policies change.

Many unforeseen factors arose throughout the involvement of the consultant in the development, validation and use of the test item bank for police promotion examinations. The test consultant should exercise caution before accepting a role in high-stakes competency testing such as this.

APPENDIX

Police Promotion Examination References

Category 1: Arkansas Criminal Code

State of Arkansas. (1985). Arkansas Criminal Code. Charlottesville, Virginia: Michie Company.

Category 2: Traffic Laws

Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department and Department of Finance and Administration. (1987). Arkansas Motor Vehicle and Traffic Laws and State Highway Commission Regulations. Little Rock: State of Arkansas.

Category 3: Criminal Investigation Procedures

Miles, Jr., J. G., Richardson, D. B., & Scudellari, A. E. (1987). The Law Officer's Pocket Manual. Washington, D. C.: Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.

State of Arkansas. (1988). Arkansas Law Enforcement Officer's Criminal Reference Manual. Little Rock, Arkansas: S & S Publishing.

Category 4: Departmental Policy and Procedures

Jonesboro Civil Service Commission. (1984). Jonesboro Civil Service Performance and Promotion Evaluation Philosophy, Rules, Procedures and Forms. Jonesboro, Arkansas.

Jonesboro Police Department. (1988). Policy and Procedure Manual. Jonesboro, Arkansas.

Jonesboro Police Department. (1988). Rules and Regulation Manual. Jonesboro, Arkansas.

Category 5: Supervision

Lynch, R. G. (1986). The Police Manager: Professional Leadership Skills (3rd ed.). New York: Random House.

Category 6: Administration

Shanahan, D. T. (1985). Patrol Administration: Management by Objectives (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.